

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 /026 W
-----029753 171733Z /50

O 171558Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7150
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 1459

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, LE, IS
SUBJECT: THE IDES OF MARCH: ISRAEL IN LEBANON

1. ISRAEL IS IN THE PROCESS OF CARRYING OUT THE BIGGEST
MILITARY OPERATION IN THE NEAR EAST SINCE THE RAMADAN/YOM
KIPPUR WAR. AS IN ALL CASES OF MILITARY INTERVENTION OF SUCH
MAGNITUDE, IT HAS UNLEASHED UNRECKONABLE FORCES AND NO ONE
KNOWS WHERE THE ROLLER COASTER IS GOING TO STOP. ONE
THING SEEMS CLEAR, HOWEVER; WE WILL NOT BE RETURNING TO THE
STATUS QUO ANTE.

2. FOR THE FEEBLE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT THE ISSUE IS POSED

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IN RATHER STARK TERMS. THE ISRAELIS HAVE DISLODGED THE
ARMED PALESTINIANS FROM POSITIONS ALONG THE BORDER. WHERE
WILL THOSE PALESTINIANS GO AND WHAT WILL THEY DO? HOW
CAN THEY BE BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL? ARE THE LEBANESE GOING
TO BE WORSE OR BETTER OFF AS A RESULT?

3. THE CHRISTIANS ARE IN GENERAL PLEASED WITH THE INVASION.

THEY HOPE THE ISRAELIS WILL KILL ALL THE PALESTINIANS OR CHASE THEM INTO SYRIA. KOL ISRAEL REPORTS THAT MAJOR HADDAD, COMMANDER OF THE CHRISTIAN FORCES AT QALAYA, SAYS THE SITUATION IS "MUCH MORE BETTER". PRESIDENT CHAMOUN SENDS A MESSAGE TO ME NOT TO LISTEN TOO MUCH TO FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS, I.E., DON'T PUT PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO WITHDRAW, SIMILAR SENTIMENTS COME FROM THE GOVERNOR OF SOUTH LEBANON, WHO IS QUITE PLEASED THAT THE ISRAELIS HAVE FINALLY MOVED. THE SHIA FROM THE SOUTH WERE GENERALLY ENTHUSIASTIC AT FIRST BUT ARE DISAPPOINTED THAT THE ISRAELIS APPARENTLY DO NOT INTEND TO CLEAN OUT ALL THE AREA SOUTH OF THE LITANI. MEANWHILE THE VARIOUS SISTERLY ARAB GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THE BOARD ARE SENDING MESSAGES OF INDIGNATION AND SUPPORT, DISREGARDING THE CONTRIBUTION THEY HAVE MADE TO THIS MESS BY THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE FEDAYEEN.

4. THE ISRAELIS ARE THINKING IN TERMS OF WITHDRAWAL IN EXCHANGE FOR ASSURANCES THAT FATAH WILL NOT MOVE BACK INTO THE AREAS VACATED. THE PROBLEM IS THAT NO ONE NOW HERE CAN GIVE SUCH ASSURANCES. A UN FORCE, PROPERLY CONSTITUTED AND LED, COULD DO THE JOB. THE LEBANESE ARMY ALONE IN ITS PRESENT DONDITION COULD NOT. THE PALESTINIANS WOULD GO RIGHT THROUGH THEM.

5. WHILE THE IDEA OF A UNEF WHICH COULD GRADUALLY TURN THINGS OVER TO THE LEBANESE ARMY AND THUS RESTORE LEBANESE SECRET

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SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SOUTH IS ATTRACTIVE, IT HAS IMPORTANT WEAKNESSES. TO BEGIN WITH, THE ISRAELIS HAVE ONLY SCOTCHED THE SNAKE, NOT KILLED IT. FAR FROM BEING EITHER DECIMATED OR DEMORALIZED, THE PALESTINIANS MOSTLY WITHDREW BEFORE THE ISRAELIS ARRIVED, THEIR TOTAL CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN LOW AND THEIR MORALE SEEMS GENERALLY TO BE UP BECAUSE OF THE SHOWING THEY HAVE MADE AGAINST THE ISRAELIS. THEY HAVE DISPERSED, BUT THEIR BASIC MILITARY CAPABILITY REMAINS ESSENTIALLY INTACT. THEY ARE LIKELY TO USE IT AGAINST THE LEBANESE AND A UNEF AS WELL AS AGAINST THE ISRAELIS.

6. AT THIS POINT THE PALESTINIANS APPARENTLY ARE FREE TO MOVE AROUND WITHIN THE RECTANGLE BETWEEN THE ISRAELI LINES ON THE EAST AND SOUTH AND THE SEA AND THE LITANI ON THE WEST AND NORTH. THEY PRESUMABLY ARE SUBJECT TO HARRASSING FIRE AND PERHAPS PATROL ACTION, BUT THEY ARE STILL ABLE TO FIRE KATUYSHA ROCKETS INTO NORTHERN ISRAEL AND WILL HAVE, UNLESS REMOVED, A CAPABILITY THEY SAY THEY INTEND TO USE.

7. THE MOST OBVIOUS WAY TO DEAL WITH THIS RECTANGLE IS FOR THE ISRAELIS TO OCCUPY IT, SENDING ALL ARMED PALESTINIANS NORTH OF THE LITANI. THERE, PERHAPS THE SYRIANS

COULD BE COERCED INTO CONTROLLING THEM, PARTICULARLY IF THE ISRAELIS THREATENED TO STRIKE ACROSS THE LITANI AT SYRIANS AS WELL AS PALESTINIANS IF THEY DID NOT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE POLITICAL RISKS FOR THE SYRIANS OF PLAYING POLICEMAN FOR ISRAEL MIGHT BE JUST TOO MUCH. IF THE SYRIANS REFUSE TO BE POLICEMAN, WHAT THEN? THE ISRAELIS WILL HAVE MOVED THEIR PROBLEM A FEW MILES NORTH, BUT NOT SOLVED IT, NOR WILL THEY HAVE REDUCED SIGNIFICANTLY THE PALESTINIAN CAPABILITY FOR TERRORIST OPERATIONS INSIDE ISRAEL, MOST OF WHICH DID NOT GO ACROSS THIS PARTICULAR BORDER IN ANY EVENT.

8. IN SHORT, THERE IS NO END IN SIGHT. WHILE WE BELIEVE THE USG HAS NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO ITS PRESENT POLICY OF
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TRYING TO PERSUADE THE ISRAELIS TO WITHDRAW IN RETURN FOR INSTALLATION OF A UNEF, WE SHOULD HAVE NO ILLUSIONS THAT THIS WILL SETTLE THE PROBLEM, EVEN TEMPORARILY, UNLESS THE SYRIANS ARE PREPARED TO ASSUME A MORE ACTIVE ROLE THAN THEY HAVE PLAYED SINCE LAST NOVEMBER IN CONTROLLING THE PALESTINIANS. EVEN IF THEY ELECT TO PLAY IT, WE ARE NOT SURE THEY ARE CAPABLE OF BRINGING THEM UNDER CONTROL. WE FEAR WE HAVE HERE A PROBLEM THAT IS NOT GOING TO BE SOLVED SHORT OF AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT WHICH GIVES THE PALESTINIANS A COUNTRY TO CALL THEIR OWN.
PARKER

SECRET

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: COMBAT OPERATIONS, INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT01459
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780119-0696
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780357/aaaabvqr.tel
Line Count: 147
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 29a317c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3297154
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE IDES OF MARCH: ISRAEL IN LEBANON
TAGS: PEPR, MOPS, PDEV, MARR, LE, IS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/29a317c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014